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## TEACHING SHAKESPEARE TO ENGINEERS

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What I have to say concerning the teaching of Shakespeare has to do particularly with engineering Freshmen, but it is just as applicable to any set of underclassmen who are essentially unliterary, if not inclined to be actually hostile toward any form of English literature. It does not seem to me necessary to defend a Shakespeare course for engineering students, particularly in the pages of the *English Journal*, but I should like at the outset to state why I believe a study of Shakespeare is especially valuable for an engineer. The typical engineering Freshman has an interesting, active mind, but a very narrow one. His eye has been so steadily fixed on his future profession that he has failed to see the need, even the professional need, of a broad contact with life, of a sympathetic knowledge of human nature. Literature, and particularly dramatic literature, where character is unfolded in action, gives any student a contact with life. And Shakespeare, whose broad interpretation of life, if properly presented, cannot fail to interest the youthful as well as the mature mind, is an ideal author to teach to engineers.

The first consideration is a proper text. I believe thoroughly in an unexpurgated text for Freshmen engineers; in a text which has a brief introduction and few notes, for much historical and critical material would only repel Freshmen; in a text which has an excellent glossary, for, though but little should be attempted in the nature of a history of words, the student must understand what he reads. Hence a handy glossary is a necessity, and its use should be insisted upon.

The next consideration is the choice of plays. Obviously we should choose something which has probably not been read in the high school, and which will, at the same time, appeal to youth. I have in mind four plays which have been successfully tried out with

engineering Freshmen in a half-year course of two hours a week. These plays are *I Henry IV*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Twelfth Night*.

There is a final consideration before we turn to a discussion of the methods of teaching. Shakespeare wrote for a particular set of conditions; therefore some knowledge of the Elizabethan theater and of Elizabethan London will be helpful in furnishing the student's mind with a proper background for the plays. This can be given either by the teacher or preferably by some brief, illustrated introduction to Shakespeare, which should be owned by the student and which, together with the four plays studied, should serve as the nucleus for a complete Shakespearean library.

The assignment should not be too long. If four plays are studied the rate of progression will be about a play a month, or a little less than an act for each recitation. The speed should be leisurely enough to permit the clearing-up of all obscure points, and yet rapid enough to hold the attention of the student on the story which is being unfolded before his eyes.

The recitation should of course show that the student has grasped this unfolding of the story, but the study of plot development is one of the danger points in teaching Shakespeare to immature minds. The study of the plot must not be a dry, unimaginative thing; the plot must become alive. Some idea of plot construction may be imparted to engineers, however, because the engineer is primarily a builder; he likes to see how things are put together. Although as a rule the use of diagrams and technical terms such as "rising action," "climax," and "catastrophe" tends to become a meaningless and profitless thing, as far as the Freshman is concerned, a certain amount of discussion may very profitably be spent upon the construction of such a play as *Romeo and Juliet*. The value of the opening street brawl as introductory matter becomes evident to the dullest engineer; it becomes quite apparent that events are leading swiftly up to the duel in Act III which forms so fine a contrast with the opening brawl; and that later circumstances are paving the way for the fatal ending. Any discussion of plot-building, of scene construction and scene arrangement should be aided by a discussion of how contemporary plays

are built, plays which the students have recently seen and which they wish to use as illustrations in class.

The recitation should also show that the student has understood both the dialogue and the characterization. The teacher should read to the class passages here and there, so that the interpretation of line or character may become perfectly clear. It is not desirable that this reading be dramatic; much can be accomplished for the student by merely interpretative reading on the part of the teacher. In this way the humor of a situation, the beauty of a line, or the true meaning of a character may be made apparent. If the students have a chance to see the play acted, so much the better. Let the characters become alive, at all events, even if no Shakespearean actors come to town. By all means avoid a bare, unimaginative treatment of characters. Too many boys, I have found, are prejudiced against Shakespeare in the high school by too dry a treatment of such plays as *Julius Caesar* and the *Merchant of Venice*. Such boys come to college actually ignorant of the fact that a Shakespearean play has in it anything interesting for them. Surely the characters of Prince Hal and Hotspur (what a chance for contrast!) can be made intensely alive for young men, not to mention that prince of fat men, Falstaff. In *Romeo and Juliet*, that play of young love, there is a wealth of interesting material for the young man: the difference between Romeo's love for Rosalind and his love for Juliet, the fiery nature of Tybalt, the friendship of Benvolio, the heights and depths revealed by Mercutio. Here is where the student is going to receive his contact with different views of life. Discussion and even argument should be stimulated; violent likes and dislikes are better than no response, and much can be done with a class which becomes stirred by conflicting opinions as to Shakespeare's characters.

The teacher must understand the point of view of the engineer and work accordingly. Infinite tact is needed in the proper approach to the engineer's mind. Objections and dislikes must be met oftentimes before they arise. An engineer, unlike some kinds of students, has to be forced to like literature, but the deed is not an impossibility. Many a boy has resolved to dislike Shakespeare violently, simply because a misguided high-school teacher over-

praised him, or raved *ad nauseam* concerning the greatness of his works. The boy was told that he ought to admire; consequently he hated with boyish ardor. Such Freshmen are as a rule easily handled. They should be met halfway and shown that Shakespeare was after all human and had to learn to write plays by rigorous experimentation.

The teacher who is conducting an undergraduate recitation in Shakespeare should stand; nay, even walk about. He should throw himself into each recitation with an abundance of vitality; he should not be afraid to spend himself; on the contrary, he should be fearful lest that worst calamity that could befall a teacher descend on him, lest his class lose interest and attention, or perchance fall asleep. He should be resourceful, ever ready to take advantage of any opening which will advance the student's appreciation of the play. He should possess a keen sense of humor, and an abundant knowledge of how to handle young men. Thus and only thus may he conquer the half-formed opinions of the Freshman engineer, and lead him, an unwitting victim, to that broad contact with life which Shakespeare so abundantly gives.